

Take a hike



Courtesy of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association

Are you ready for a back country adventure? Rural Tennessee is home to some of the most beautiful, secluded forest pathways in the United States. One of these is the Benton MacKaye Trail.

With its glorious ridgeline views and the innumerable crossings of mountain streams, the 288-mile-long Benton MacKaye Trail comes by its reputation for beauty honestly. Nestled in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, the Benton MacKaye Trail has some of the most varied and abundant wildflowers of any temperate climate forest in the world – and – the variety of tree species is second to none. Whether it's the creek-side trilliums in the spring, the reddish orange of the fall sugar maples at the higher elevations or the unmatched 360-degree views in the winter, the Benton MacKaye Trail is a visual treat any time of the year – it truly is an awesome hike!

The Benton MacKaye Trail is named for visionary forester, Benton MacKaye. Last year marked the 100th anniversary of Benton MacKaye's treatise, 'An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning'. That essay was the initial blueprint for the Appalachian Trail. The route for the Benton

MacKaye Trail closely resembles MacKaye's proposed southern spur route that would have extended the Appalachian Trail into north-central Georgia. Currently, the southern termini for both trails reside on Springer Mountain in Georgia.

The Benton MacKaye Trail traverses 82 miles in Georgia and 206 miles in Tennessee/North Carolina. This includes the Chattahoochee-Oconee, Cherokee and Nantahala National Forests as well as 93 miles in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, making it the longest trail in the Smokies. Also known for its remoteness, a third of the trail lies in Wilderness areas where vehicular access and motorized tools are prohibited. Here, the hiker finds true peace and solitude.

Whigg Meadow, Upper Bald River Falls and the remains of Doc Rogers' House as well as along the Hiwassee River to the Narrows are day hikers favorites. Backpackers love the Benton MacKaye Trail loops on Big Frog and in the Cohutta Wilderness.

"The Benton MacKaye Trail Association's all-volunteer work force first constructed and now maintains the Benton MacKaye Trail – our regularly scheduled work trips are the second and fourth Saturdays of the month," said Ken Cissna, Presi-

dent of Benton MacKaye Trail Association. "In fiscal 2021, association volunteers turned in almost 8,000 hours maintaining the trail.

Currently, the Benton MacKaye Trail Association is seeking Congressional Approval for the Benton MacKaye Trail to be designated a National Scenic Trail. To date, only 11 long-distance trails have received the prestigious designation, the Appalachian Trail being the first. These trails epitomize the splendor, diversity and historical significance found in the wide array of the American landscape.

The designation would enhance Benton MacKaye Trail Association's ability to preserve the timeless beauty of the trail's corridor. The status also would augment the Benton MacKaye Trail's already high value as a popular recreation destination for hikers as well as increase the trail's positive economic impact on local communities. And it would release additional USFS and NPS resources to help the Benton MacKaye Trail Association fulfill its mission to preserve, protect and maintain the trail corridor.

For additional information on the Benton MacKaye Trail Association, please visit the website at www.bmta.org or email Joy Forehand at jwfbgr@gmail.com.